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ABSTRACT

Strategic planning is discussed as a viable, effective method for coping with change to help an institution achieve its goals. A nine-step model of strategic planning is presented, and the results of a critique of a planning process at a major western research university are described. The nine steps are to: develop a planning culture, planning structure and organization, institutional mission, and strategic database; determine goals, strategies/programs/plans, objectives, and constraints; and evaluate the planning process and the results of the plans. The basis for determining the success of a strategic planning model must consider the extent to which the administrators' goals are accomplished when the model is applied to a postsecondary institution. The planning culture and planning structures of a major western research university are examined, noting the context within which the planning for education occurred. Two features of the planning process at this university that are especially intriguing are the lack of a planning culture and the limited participation of those who would be directly affected by the planning. Though the administration and planners fulfilled all other elements of a strategic planning model, ignoring these two features are fundamental reasons that after more than 5 years, there was still major disagreement surrounding the proposed plans and strategies designed to bring its education programs to a place of distinction. Contains 23 references. (SM)

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ACHIEVING DISTINCTION IN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

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Unpredictable enrollments and major demographic changes confront college administrators. Strategic planning is a viable, effective method for coping with change so an institution achieves its goals. A 9-step model of strategic planning is presented. Also described are the results of a critique of a planning process at a major western research university. Such an analysis is still rare in the literature but invaluable because of what it reveals about the strategic planning process.

Rapidly expanding physical facilities, burgeoning enrollments, and the achievement of world-wide distinction have produced a dynamic and enduring system of postsecondary education in the United States. But if college and university leaders depend upon the methods of the past to achieve success in the future, they are likely to be sorely disappointed. During the coming years, the leaders of our post-secondary institutions will have to cope with a magnitude of change that is unique in the history of colleges and universities.

The growing consensus among college administrators is that strategic planning is an effective tool for managing the impact of change on their institutions. It is an integrative process during which university leaders have the opportunity to perform a comprehensive analysis of the institution's missions, goals, and programs in a manner which focuses on issues of both quantity and quality. Instead of being at the mercy of what is happening around them, strategic planning means that administrators can "put your own intelligence, foresight and will in charge instead of outside forces and disordered concerns" (Keller, 1983, p. 75).

Strategic planning fosters successful and timely adaptation to external events. But the purpose of strategic planning is not to achieve perfection. In

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fact, the pitfalls of such an attitude are noted by George Keller: "He who lives by the crystal ball will often eat broken glass" (Keller, 1983, p. 106). What strategic planning is, is an avenue for "progressive accomplishment" of the institution's mission and objectives in the midst of the uncertainty and unpredictability of a challenging future (Stadtman, 1980, p. 13).

Planned change is a deliberate process. In order to be successful it must be organized yet adaptable to the unique characteristics of an institution. Six elements critical to successful strategic planning were identified in a case study at Furman University (Hipps, 1982, pp. 28-30). The elements were:

1) clarify basic policies and establish general guidelines
2) avoid rumors and gain acceptance for planning efforts;
3) create a planning environment and develop the planning process before actually beginning the planning activities;
4) do not just copy another model;
5) allow for making as well as revising agreements; and
6) keep the process simple and minimize paperwork.

The following strategic planning model, based extensively on the theories presented by William King and David Cleland, is designed to achieve flexibility and fulfill these six requirements. The nine steps are:

1) develop a planning culture;
2) develop a planning structure and organization;
3) develop the institutional mission;
4) develop strategic databases;
5) determine goals;
6) determine strategies, programs, and plans;
7) determine objectives;
8) determine constraints and develop contingency plans; and
9) evaluate the planning process and the results of the plans.

Step 1: Development of the Planning Culture The first step when implementing a planning process at a college or university is to develop a planning culture. The challenge is to cultivate "planful attitudes" and proper time perspectives. When people possess "planful attitudes," they understand that the future is the perspective of true planning. They become accustomed to asking "how might this decision affect the future of the institution?" each time they make a decision.

Many people are pessimistic about the benefits of planning. Faculty, in particular, often believe planning is not a legitimate part of the faculty role (King and Cleland, 1978, p. 274). Since planning focuses on campus-wide goals and missions, many faculty perceive this to conflict with their individual goals and responsibilities. Thus, it is important for the planners to demonstrate how strategic planning will benefit their institution. For example, will the level of future resources for a particular department be based upon the outcomes of the plans? How have other universities benefitted from strategic planning? By taking the time to develop a planning culture in which the benefits of planning are highlighted, the planners are more likely to gain the support of one cohort of persons -- the faculty -- who can play an instrumental role in the achievement of the institution's goals.

Step 2: Development of the Planning Structure When administrators establish a strategic planning structure, they are planning to plan. Four issues must be addressed. The scope and span of strategic planning must be determined, deadlines and priorities must be set, the roles and responsibilities of the participants must be clarified, and the specific structure within which planning will occur must be established. The administrators' goal is to establish a planning structure which takes into consideration the unique features of their particular institution. For example, if a committee composed only of top administrators is established as the planning body but the college's traditional decision-making process is by faculty committees, the planners ignore a fundamental characteristic of the institution which is likely to thwart the success of their strategic planning activities.

A distinctive feature of strategic planning is that it is a collective process of deciding on "the objectives of an organization, on changes in these objectives, and on the policies that are going to govern the acquisition, use, and disposition of resources" (Salloway and Tack, 1978, p. 3). Therefore, "widespread participation appears to be necessary for successful substantive planning" (Ringle and Savickas, 1983, p. 649). A planning process founded on widespread participation is one in

which careful consideration of decisions is encouraged, there is a high level of faculty involvement, and planning is viewed as a process, not just as a product. The latter point is important. When planners refuse to focus solely on what is produced, the planning participants have greater freedom during the decision-making process to explore alternatives and to debate differing viewpoints.

There are numerous other benefits of broad-based participation. Broad-based participation means it is more likely all of the institution's available informational resources will be incorporated into the planning process. Broad-based participation is a critical factor in preventing the apathy, resistance, and even outright rebellion that result when decisions are imposed by the top leadership. Finally, a broad-based strategic planning process demonstrates that accountability for the achievement of the institution's goals is shared by both high-level administrators and the rest of the institution's members.

Unfortunately, simply advocating participation is inadequate. All too often, university administrators or planners characterize planning as participatory when what they really mean is that they have developed techniques to persuade employees to accept decisions which have already been made. The employees have not been given genuine opportunities to participate in the formulating of the decisions. Therefore, when a participatory planning process is established, the planners must be honest about the level of participation of the institution's different constituencies that will be allowed.

Step 3: Development of Mission Statement The third step in the development of the strategic planning process is an examination of the mission of the unit on which planning will focus. This may be the institution as a whole or a single unit or department. If a mission statement does not exist, it is written at this point. If one is already written, it is re-examined and necessary revisions are made. This step in the strategic planning process presents an opportunity for administrators to engage in concentrated institutional introspection and to perform a thorough assessment of the vision and purposes of the institution.

Step 4: Development of Strategic Databases The fourth step in establishing a planning process is the development of strategic databases. Strategic databases are data that have been evaluated (King and Cleland, 1978, p. 134). Strategic databases are not just statistical lists, tables, and graphs. They are statements of the most significant variables which affect the institution's decision-making. For example, rather than simply presenting a graph of projected enrollments for the next twenty years, strategic databases include an explanation of the factors, such as changing admission policies, which are expected to influence the projections.

Three types of strategic databases should be developed: organizational assessment, environmental assessment and competitor assessment. Organizational assessment focuses on what is happening within the institution itself. Environmental assessment, as implied by the name, focuses on the external variables that affect the institution's achievement of its goals. Finally, competitor assessment is the method the institution uses to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the competition. One component of competitor assessment is claimant analysis. Claimant analysis examines two factors. First, which groups of people believe they have the right to influence the institution's actions to some degree because of the institution's impact on them? Second, what are the claims of those people and how do the claims relate to the objectives of the institution? An example of claimant analysis is examining what public school personnel expect from university teacher training programs and how their expectations and claims affect the mission and nature of the institution's programs.

Step 5: Determination of Goals The fifth step of the strategic planning process is the determination of the institution's goals. Goals are general statements of the institution's aspirations that provide focus and direction. They do not specify how success will be achieved or measured. Unlike objectives, goals are broad, timeless statements.

Step 6: Determination of Strategies, Programs, and Plans The sixth step in the strategic planning process is the formulation of written plans. A written plan is the institution's response to its anticipated future. It is a documentation of the strategies that have been proposed for achieving its objectives. Plans are objective-focused, time-based, and output-oriented activities intended to link the institution's mission with the institution's ongoing operations.

Step 7: Determination of Objectives The seventh step of the strategic planning process is the formulation of objectives. Objectives are specific activities which will be implemented at a particular time in order to achieve the institution's mission and objectives. Objectives are interrelated; that is, each objective supports the achievement of all the other objectives. They are not formulated — or achieved — in isolation from each other. Objectives are checkpoints, or milestones, used to evaluate and revise the institution's strategies and plans.

Step 8: Determination of Constraints and Contingency Plans Once plans are formulated and objectives are prioritized, the next step is to determine constraints and develop contingency plans. Constraints are internal or external variables, positive or negative, which may influence the institution's activities. When administrators perform constraint analysis, they attempt to identify important developments affecting the future and to describe the potential impact of those developments so that needed changes to the plans and strategies can be anticipated.

Step 9: Evaluation of the Planning Process and the Results of the Plans. The ninth and final step in the implementation of strategic planning is evaluation. There are two components of evaluation. One is, obviously, an evaluation of the outcomes of the process. To what extent did the plans and strategies result in achievement of the institution's mission and goals? The second component, which is frequently omitted, is evaluation of the planning process itself. To what degree was the proposed model of planning followed? How did that influence the institution's achievement of its goals and objectives? For example, if an institution's

planners failed to allow those affected by the decisions to participate, how did that influence the quality and implementation of the resulting plans?

Critique

The basis for determining the success of a strategic planning model must consider the extent to which the administrators' purposes and goals are accomplished when the model is applied to the real world setting of a postsecondary institution. A planning model which works well only on paper is of little use. Unfortunately, reports of the results of evaluations of actual planning processes remain rare.

In order to determine the feasibility of my planning model, I critiqued the planning activities at a major western research university. The focus of the planning process was the institution's education programs, which include teacher preparation and credential programs, and master of arts programs. My evaluation is based on a review of the university's planning documents and interviews with nineteen campus administrators, planning participants, and education faculty. In this paper, I will focus on two features of the strategic planning model which had significant impact on this institution's planning activities: the planning culture and the planning structure. Concerning the planning structure I will discuss the extent to which those affected by the plans participated in the planning process.

Before critiquing this institution's process, it is important to understand the context within which the planning for education occurred. At this university, campus-wide enrollment in education programs is approximately 160 students annually. General or specialist credentials are sought by two-thirds of the students; one-third of the students pursue masters' degrees. The mission for the education programs describes two major goals: 1) upgrading education in elementary, secondary and postsecondary schools in California; and 2) serving as a liaison between faculty members and departments on campus interested in, and responsible for, the education of those who staff these schools.

Planning for the education programs at this university began in May, 1982, when the campus' top administrator appointed the first of three committees. The first committee worked for thirteen months. In its final report, the committee recommended that the institution establish a single administrative unit (a division of education) responsible for the campus' education programs. This would eliminate the fragmentation in the campus' education programs. The committee also recommended that the institution pursue, in a systematic and organized manner, education research that is the cooperative effort of a broad cross-section of faculty from various disciplines. As a result, the campus could make a significant impact on the serious, identifiable problems of public education and have the potential to bring significant national distinction to the campus within a reasonable amount of time. The committee specified that the formation of the single administrative structure should be accomplished by July 1, 1987, but only after certain sub-groups had been established, such as an institute for applied research and a teacher education workgroup.

Except for discussions of the report by campus administrators, no action was taken to implement this committee's recommendations. The next step in the planning process was appointment of two new committees. One committee, a coordinating council, was to focus on the broader questions of how a research university can improve the preparation of teachers and the quality of school instruction. The second planning committee was charged with developing plans for the implementation of the first report. This committee completed its task within thirteen months. Contrary to the initial committee's report, this planning committee recommended that a division of education be established immediately.

Again, except for discussions, no action was taken to implement this committee's recommendations and the next step in the planning process was the formation of an implementation committee. Appointed in September, 1985, the committee was charged with the task of implementing the campus' plans to improve educational practices through educational research and teacher education. Seventeen

months later, in February, 1987, the implementation committee issued a draft proposal. This proposal recommended that a single academic/administrative unit, viz., a Division of Educational Research and External Services, be formed. The central feature of the proposal was similar to what had been suggested by the previous committees: the use of the agricultural extension model. With its emphasis on applied research, employing that model was viewed as one of the most effective methods for encouraging cooperative and collaborative research between the university and the public schools.

Development of the Planning Culture My analysis of this institution's planning activities revealed that very little was done to establish a constructive planning environment. In fact, a repeated theme throughout my interviews was the lack of commitment to the planning activities among the department of education faculty. Anxiety, nervousness, disdain, alienation, and anger, to varying degrees, were experienced by most individuals, and there was no evidence that the campus administrators or planners initiated any activities which might alleviate those emotions. For example, they did not convey to the department information about how the department would benefit from the planning, or even how planning has enabled colleges and universities to achieve their mission and objectives.

The onset of planning was viewed by several persons as a means of punishing the department for not implementing the changes desired by campus administrators. That was not an unreasonable conclusion since the education faculty knew that some campus officials thought the institution's education programs should be abolished. Unfortunately, there was a significant lack of consensus between campus officials and education faculty concerning what the problems were. There were even some education faculty members who were not convinced that any problems existed. Under the circumstances, administrators who developed a planning culture in order to gain full consensus were not likely to be successful. Nevertheless, if the planners and administrators had taken the time — before planning began —to clarify their concerns and communicate the benefits of planning for the department and for the

university, the resulting level of dissension and distrust might have been mitigated.

Since some members of the education department did not agree with the administration that problems existed, and several others did not agree with the proposed solutions, should the planning process have continued? There are two reasons why the planning process should not have continued. One reason is the tradition of academic freedom. Faculty members can generally choose what courses they will teach and what subjects they will research with minimal, if any, interference from other faculty or administrators. Thus, planning which imposed decisions without faculty input or agreement would not be justified. The second reason planning should not have continued is the apparent lack of evidence that the department of education was not doing a good job. For example, the employability of the students who attain teacher credentials is above 90% in all the general education programs and 100% in some of the specialized programs. Also, the department of education always has more applicants for its programs than there are slots available. In light of such evidence, the argument that the education programs need improvement seems implausible.

On what basis, then, did the administration justify its imposition of planning? According to most of the officials I interviewed, the real problem was not that what the department was doing now was of inferior quality. The real problem was that the department was judged as performing the wrong kinds of activities. Specifically, the department was not engaging in interdisciplinary, applied research with the public schools which the administrators believed was essential if the education programs at this research university were going to fulfill the campus' mission. The education department had not indicated its intentions to redirect its enterprises; therefore, the administration believed that external intervention was justified.

Another reason campus administrators believed they were justified in implementing an externally-imposed planning process dominated by non-education

faculty concerns sphere of influence. Since the quality of the teachers in our public schools affects the quality of education provided to the state's youth, the university cannot ignore its responsibilities for providing excellent teacher preparation programs. Since the campus administrators believed that the university's responsibilities could not be achieved without changes in the existing programs, it is, perhaps, not unreasonable that the administration believed that external intervention in the department's affairs was necessary despite the disagreement of the members of the department.

Development of the Planning Structure: Who Will Participate? Considering the failure of the campus administration to create a planning culture, one would hope that the administration would develop a planning structure aimed at counteracting the obvious disenchantment with planning among the department faculty. Unfortunately, my analysis revealed that no such actions were taken. In fact, the administration failed to incorporate into the planning structure one element which probably could have significantly neutralized the negative attitudes: broad-based participation.

The flow of information among the members of the individual committees, as well as between the committees and the university administration was efficient and consistent. But the education department faculty — those who would be directly affected by the planning decisions — were consistently omitted from the information loop. There was no systematic or formal process of communicating with the department individually or collectively during the planning process. Even though two education faculty served on each committee, all committee members agreed, including those who were from the education department, that they were not viewed by the committees as official representatives of the department.

This limited participation might have been acceptable if procedures for systematically soliciting the views and concerns of the entire education faculty had been established. But the campus administration and planners did not develop such procedures. None of the education faculty I interviewed recalled that the planning

committees had ever solicited their reactions or views before a draft proposal was prepared. The implementation committee conscientiously tried to include the education department faculty in its planning process, but it was too little, too late to counter the department's sense of alienation. Consistently omitted from the planning process, the education department faculty members were given little incentive to develop a sense of commitment to the purposes and goals of the planning process. When the people who must change are systematically excluded from the formulation of proposals, it is unrealistic to expect them to make major change. The department of education was no exception and, unfortunately, this probably reinforced the view of the administration that the department would never come up with the "right" answer. But from the department's perspective, this was one way in which the department was able to retain a degree of control over its own future.

In fairness, this harsh critique must be balanced with a discussion of what benefits were expected by severely limiting the education department's participation. First, it was assumed that the participation of non-education faculty members, at the expense of the education department, would heighten objectivity and make it easier to implement major changes at the institution. As one person I interviewed said, "sometimes one needs a whole new generation of scholars in order to implement needed changes." Second, the campus administrators hoped that by creating committees composed of highly respected people from disciplines other than education, the respect for them would transfer to a greater respect for the field of education at this institution. Increased respect would then enhance the legitimacy of augmenting the level of resources directed to education.

Despite the merit of these goals, there is no doubt that the failure to involve the department of education hampered the effectiveness of the planning process. It was amazing that after five years of planning, no major changes occurred in the administration of this institution's education programs. Two years after this critique was finished, approval to form the new division was granted and the personnel and resources were allocated in summer, 1989. However, rather than being

a result of a planning process which reinforced the critical features of strategic planning, i.e., the creation of a planning culture and extensive participation by the education department, the division's formation occured because of two fortuitous events: the retirement of a top campus administrator, and the political skills and expertise of the chairman of the committee responsible for implementing the plan.

Conclusion Two features of the planning process at this major western research university that are especially intriguing are the lack of a planning culture and the limited participation of those who would be directly affected by the planning. In fact, the link between those two features and the problems associated with the achievement of the planning objectives are justifications of the validity of the strategic planning model that has been described. Even though the administration and planners fulfilled all the other elements of a strategic planning model, ignoring those two features are fundamental reasons that after more than five years, there was still major disagreement surrounding the proposed plans and strategies designed to bring the institution's education programs to a place of distinction.

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